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ABSTRACT

Since 1930, changes in definitions of "rural" population trends, teacher preparation, educational philosophy, school organization, and curriculum and federal funding have influenced the educational opportunities provided by rural schools. Dedicated leaders in groups such as the National Education Association's Department of Rural Education, the 1939 Educational Policies Commission, the United States Office of Education, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, the Ford Foundation, and the American Association of School Administrators have attempted to improve rural education by identifying specific problems and seeking solutions. Teacher preparation has been improved as high school normal training programs for rural elementary teachers have been eliminated, substandard certification requirements have been upgraded, and inservice programs have been instituted. The progressive philosophy of education popular in the 1930's and 1940's was replaced in the 1950's and 1960's by the community school philosophy, still popular today. School organization has changed dramatically as districts too weak to provide adequate educational programs for a changing rural population have been consolidated at the local or administrative level. The Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965 has made more federal funds available to rural schools. Rural school improvement efforts should consider rural values, rural-urban differences, the community school concept, and improved instruction methods. (SB)

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What is Rural Education? In the Past 50 Years

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Rural Education has been and remains an important segment of the American educational system. During the past fifty years, individuals and groups have been concerned about the quality of living in rural communities and the educational opportunities of students in rural school. These schools have changed as the conditions in rural communities and the citizens' philosophy of education have been altered. Some of these changes have been beneficial, while others have created new porblems.

Eleanor Roosevelt, at the 1944 White House Conference on Rural Education said, "The real reason for this conference is that many of ouw rural-school children have labored under difficulties which must be made known to the people. It is important that more people, in city and country, know the facts so they will back up the plans made here by those who already know them, and have known them for years." This is the same purpose for this 1980 Conference on Rural Education.

The Distinction Between Rural and Urban Areas

Prior to 1900, all of the United States with the exception of metropolitan centers in the eastern and western section of the nation was considered to be rural. It was a simple matter to distinguish between rural and urban communities. Later, the United States census classified population centers of 2,500 or less as rural. During the 1950's and 1960's, it was recognized that the former definition of "rural" was no longer appropriate. With the rapid changes in transportation and communication, the characteristics between rural and

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urban areas became more alike. Rural people had electricity, telephones, radios, and television. The farmer had cars and trucks and could travel to distant points and could use gadgets in the farm operations.

Another definition indicated that areas not included in "standard metropolitan statistical areas" were rural. This definition broadened the meaning of "rural." For example, in Nebraska, the entire state with the exception of Omaha and Lincoln would be considered rural.

Definitions of Rural Education

Rural education has had a variety of definitions and each has influences the educational opportunities which have been made available. It has been defined in terms of population centers of 2,500 or less. On the other hand, it has been referred to school not located in "standard metropolitan statistical areas." Some people consider rural education as pertaining to "small schools" without defining the meaning of "small schools."

Burton W. Kreitlow defined rural education as the process of bringing about changes in people living in rural areas. He stated that "the key is not in the number of people but in the relationships between people and people and the land."

The Influences of Shifts in Population

Millions of Americans have preferred to loive in rural communities--on farms or in small towns. The living in rural communities permitted the people to know their neighbors and to share in their joys and sorrows. The villages provided services for both farm and village citizens.

With the changes in the means of transportation, a mobile population

was created. Developments in technology and changes in the socio-economic and political situations resulted in increses in the population of urban centers. A migration from rural to urban areas became apparent as individuals sought employment opportunities. People who migrated from the rural communities to metropolitan centers were not prepared for urban living. In 1962, Robert Isenberg stated that there were two major problems. One was that the urual people who migrated lacked educational attainments and marketable skills. The second one was that s surplus of rural youth had been forced to leave their communities to seek employment.

In 1961, there were 54 million people living in rural areas--one of every three Americans was a rural resident. From 1950 to 1960, the non-farm population increased 18.8 percent, while the rural farm population decreased 32.2 percent.

However, during the 1970's there has been a reversal of national migration patterns. Frank Triplett reported that the non-metropolitan areas have started to grow faster than metropolitan centers. While the population increased 4.8 percent from ;970-1975, towns of 2,500 to 25.000 rose 7.5 percent, and the smallest towns, those under 2,500, jumped 8.7 percent. These shifts in migration patterns could constitute some concerns during the 1980's and 1990's.

Fifty Years of Leadership in Rural Education

The developments in rural education have occurred as the leadership of individual and groups have devoted their time and efforts to provide for educational opportunities for rural students. A number of state agencies have sponsored projects and programs for rural people. Some

colleges and universities have been concerned about the living conditions and the schools in rural communities. It would be extremely difficult to list all of the individuals and groups which have contributed to rural education during the past fifty years. However, there are several that should be remembered. The Department of Rural Education, NEA.

The Department of Rural Education and its Division of Rural Service of the National Education Association was established to facilitate discussions, makes studies, disseminate information relative to rural education;to extend the efforts and efficiencies of individuals engaged in rural education. The major functions were to promote advancement in rural education throughout the nation.

During the decade of 1930-1939, there were 188 papers pertaining to rural education read at the NEA conventions. This large number of papers included topics of: school consolidation, migration patterns, expanded services to rural schools, educational programs, and the raising of standards for teachers.

In 1935, Howard A. Dawson became the executive director of the Department and the executive secretary of the Division of Rural Services and served for twenty-five years as the spokesman for rural education. Upon his retirement in 1960, a special commendation was given to him and Mrs. Dawson which included the following statements.

> ...His wisdom, courage, and tenacity tempered with his deep understanding of human needs and his delightful sense of humor, have shaped and will continue to shape the educational future of children and adults throughout the world...Further evidence of his leadership are the thousands of people, lay and professional, who attributed to Dr. Dawson the

> spark of inspiration for responsibilities in their local districts, state governments, organization et national and international levels.

Howard A. Dawson was skillful in recruiting individuals to become staff members of the Department. Lois M. Clark, assistant director, Rural Services, is known throughout the nation for her contributions and leadership in rural education. Robert Isenberg, an assistant director, upon the retirement of Dr. Dawson assumed the responsibilities of the director. He, also, inspired people in rural education. Lewis R. Tamblyn was a member of the staff and later became the executive secretary of the Rural/Regional Education Association. This organization was formed when the Department of Rural Education, NEA was dissolved. The members of this Association have continued to provide leadership in rural education.

The Educational Policies Commission, 1939

The Educational Policies Commission published Educational Policies for Rural America in which it stated:

> Rural education must have educational opportunities equal to that offered in urban section if the traditional ideal of American education is to be realized. If rural education remains underfinanced and poorly organized as it is today, there is a grave danger that class education will prevail.

The White House Conference on Rural Education, 1944

The White House Conference on Rural Education was planned and directed by Field Services, Rural Service, Legislative and Federal Relations of the National Education Association. It brought together lay and professional leaders in rural education from forty-three (43) states. These individuals shared information relating to problems and

situation in rural education.

During the general sessions of the Conference, the topics discussed included: "Education To Meet the Needs of Rural Children," "Education For Community Living In Rural Areas," "The Organization and Administration of Rural Education," "The Rural Educational Plant and Equipment," and "Paying for Rural Education." Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt stated..."the chief problem of rural education is the problem of dollars and cents...the problem cannot be solved by increasing the local taxes because the taxable values are just not there... I believe, that the federal government should render financial aid where it is needed, and only where it is needed." The charter for rural children was formulated and presented at the Conference.

The United States Office of Education

This federal agency had the primary responsibility for education leadership. Its function included collecting statistics and facts relating to the conditions and programs in education in the states and territories, administering federal funds for aid to education, publishing documents pertaining to education, furnishing booklets to schools, and disseminating information relative to organization, management, and instruction of efficient school systems.

The Julius Rosenwald Fund

The Julius Rosenwald Fund provided grants to build more than five thousand (5,000) schools in the South. It, alos, made available funds for instructional programs of these schools through the publication

of learning materials.

The Ford Foundation

The Ford Foundation provided funds for projects in rural education. Elbie L. Gann and Ralph G. Bohrson directed projects through the Western States Small School Project which demonstrated promising practices in meeting the needs of rural schools.

American Association of School Administration

The American Association of School Administrators has been and remains concerned about the educational programs in small schools. In 1937, the 17th yearbook of the organization, Schools in Small Communities, expressed the following view point.

> ....the small school system should be regarded not merely as a mechanism for maintaining the best educational institution possible, but it can be conceived as the structure within which it may be possible to develop the best typw of rural social organization and the finest rural culture.

Fannie Wyche Dunn

Fannie Wyche Dunn, longtime professor of rural education at Teacher's College, Columbia University, was concerned about the welfare of rural children. She began writing about rural schools in 1912 and continued until the latter part of the 1940's. She was preparing materials for a book on rural education at the time of her death. Since the manuscript was not completed, the contract could not be fulfilled. Fortunately, the materials became available to the

Department of Rural Education, NEA, and was published as the 1951 yearbook of the Association. This yearbook and her other writings include insights and interpretations of the activities and experiences of rural children which are appropriate for today.

Trends in the Preparation of Teachers

One of the major concerns of the educational profession has been the preparation of teachers for rural and urban schools. It has been recognized that the quality of instruction is dependent upon the abilities of the classroom teacher.

As recently as the 1940's, there were available high school normal training programs for rural elementary teachers. These programs emphasized the subject matter to be taught in the elementary grades. The staff in charge of these training programs was small, in some instances only one person. The training program had a clear understanding of local rural conditions, because they were trained in schools in their immediate environments.

Some colleges and universities created Departments of Rural Education. These Departments were concerned with the quality of living in rural communities as well as the preparation of school personnel. However, many colleges or universities were less concerned about the rural areas and provided few programs for the preparation of teachers for rural schools.

According to the National Education Association, from 1951 until 1960, one teacher in 14 held substandard certificates with 59 percent of the inadequately prepared being rural elementary or secondary teachers.

In 1957, attempts were made to upgrade certificate standards for secondary teachers, but it was difficult to meet the needs of the small high school.

During the 1960's, educators indicated that one of the major problems in rural education was securing an additional supply of professionally prepared rural school personnel: administartors, teachers, supervisors, and special service personnel. It was recognized that in-service programs were needed for employed individuals which would permit them to become more effective in fulfilling their respective responsibilities.

During the 1950's and 1960's, there was a trend to disband many of the Departments of Rural Education in colleges and universities. The college preparation for prospective school personnel, including those in rural schools, was based upon similar approaches which included advancements in educational psychology, curriculum development, classroom management, methodologies, and educational administration. The differences were minimized between the needs and problems of students and teachers living in rural areas and those who lived in urban centers. The values of living and working in a rural community received few considerations. The problems of urban schools were the major concerns of the educational profession.

Upgrading of Certification Standards

During the past forty years, the upgrading of certification standards for school personnel have attempted to provide competent personnel for the nation's schools. The elimination of the high school normal training programs for rural elementary teachers and the upgrading

of all certification requirements for teachers and administrators have narrowed the gaps between the preparation of rural and urban school personnel.

Changes in the Philosophy of Education

Prior to 1900, the academic philosophy of education emphasized reading, writing, and arithmetic. During the 1930's and 1940's, the progressive philosophy of education became important in the curriculum and the operation of the rural school. This philosophy stressed the worth of an individual and his development in a particular community. During the 1950's and 1960's the community school philosophy became acceptable to the citizens in rural communities. These shifts from the academic to the progressive to the community school philosophy changed as the rural citizens recognized the needs of the students.

The major principles of the community schools philosophy involved the community's understanding of the school and the students and teachers understanding the community. There were different interpretations of the community philosophy of education. Some educators recommended that provisions for learning should function in the local community. Others viewed the school as the core of the community with a close relationship between the school and community.

In 1943, Frank E. Henzlik wrote:

> The small school was looked upon as a miniature large school. Blind imitation, or at best, cutting large schools activities to fit the facilities of the small school was accepted and hailed as efficiency... Many superintendents have utterly failed to recognize that the media for accomplishing of the objectives of small schools are frequently different from those of

large school systems.

He further stated that the community school inplied a different approach to learning. The activities of the school and the community should be interwoven so that they became one process.

The Curriculum of the Rural School

Some types of learning activities and the use of certain instructional equipment are dependent upon the physical facilities. In 1947, Laverne Burchfield stated "many rural school buildings are entirely inadequate to permit the type of programs that these schools should provide. Lighting and plumbing are often primitive. They may not have attractive playgrounds and needed playground equipment."

The 1938, 1941 and 1943 yearbooks of the Department of Rural Education, NEA, were devoted to instructional materials and techniques. These yearbooks recommended adaptations of methods and materials which would meet the needs of rural students. During the 1940's, efforts were made in many states and communities to adapt the curriculum and instructional materials in the rural schools. A number of teacher training institutions assisted in the preparation of instructional materials which would be of interest to rural children.

Fannie W. Dunn recognized the need for guidance of rural children. She stated that they share the common needs of all children. The rural child's development, the same as any child, is determined by three factors: his/her inborn capacities, the resources for physical

and mental nourishment, and guidance to use the available resources.

During the 1960's and 1970's the deficiencies of the rural school curriculum became a major concern throughout the nation. The limited curricular offerings, the lack of adequate instructional materials and equipment, and the traditional methodologies stimulated federally funded projects. Students, faculty, and members of a community became involved in program development and evaluation procedures.

Projects funded by the Office of Education, HEW, demonstrated effective ways to broaden the learning experiences of rural students. These projects included vocational and career education, non-graded instruction, team teaching, shared services, multiple class instruction, television and the use of mobile laboratories for elementary and secondary students. The implementation of these demonstrated ways depended upon the local leadership.

Trends in School Organization

The improvement of educational opportunities in rural areas depends upon making changes in the organization of school districts. Too many school districts have been too weak to provide adequate educational programs. At one time, the local school or attendance center could meet the needs of the rural community. With the advancements in technology, transportation, and communication, new demands were made upon the schools. These demands included improved and expanded curriculum offerings, such as, vocational education and special education. It became apparent that these new demands must

provided at a level of excellence with sufficient finanical support.

Since the 1940's, programs for reorganization of local school districts have received major attention. The individuals in favor of reorganization stated that the size of the school district was related to the breadth of the curriculum and the efficiency of the operation of the school in terms of per pupil costs. Arguments in opposition to reorganization plans included a fear of losing local control and the loss of community identity , the increase of costs, and the problems of transportating students.

In 1957, educators recaognized that the goals of reorganization of school districts needed to be better understood. The distinction between attendance centers and administrative units was confusing to many individuals. In 1960, one of the goald of the National Education Association stated that "small and inefficient schools should be consolidated reducing the inefficient schools districts from 40,000 to about 10,000." It was recognized that the local school district must remain the key to public education.

In 1967, Ralph D. Purdy indicated that there had been too much of the negative approach through the use of the term of "reorganization." He believed that the emphasis should be placed upon school district organization of which there were two types. One being the local school district as an administrative unity that could provide and financially support a program of education broad enough to meet the various post-high school careers. The second type would be a larger administrative unity, sometimes on a multicounty basis, to provide educational services that would be difficult for the local school

district to offer.

Intermediate Service Units

Intermediate service units were created by some of the state legislatures and were known by various names, such as, Boards of Cooperative Services, Cooperative Educational Service Agency, Intermediate School Districts, Educational Service Units, and others. Some of the service units provided only services and others provided services and administered programs such as those in special education. The creation of an area service unit permitted local administrative districts to operate with smaller enrollments. In many of the states, the intermediate service unit replaced the traditional county superintendency.

Federal Aid for Rural Education

The federal government has provided funds for vocational agriculture programs in secodnary schools since 1917. An increase in federal funds to local school districts became available with the enactment of the Elementary Secondary Education Act in 1965. The larger rural school districts were able to secure funds through the approval of proposals which had been submitted. However, the smaller rural school districts lacked the expertise in preparing proposals or the enrollments of these schools were too small to justify seeking federal funds.

The approved proposals provided funds for certain programs which included special education, career education, library materials,

bilingual education, and audio-visual equpiment. These grants were made directly to local school districts or were channeled through the state department of education. Some states permitted an intermediate service unit to submit proposals for federal funds. These funds were used to improve educational programs in the smaller rural school districts, as well as in the larger district.

Summary

During the past fifty years, there have been changes in the living standards and conditions in rural areas, in the philosophies of education, in the preparation of rural school personnel, a reduction in the number of local school districts, in the increase of federal and state aid to education, and in provisions for students with special needs. These changes have occurred through the efforts of dedicated individuals and groups. It might be assumed that the concerns of former rural educators and citizens have been resolved. However, this would be a false assumption.

During the next decades, there should be efforts made by dedicated individuals to continue to improve educational opportunities for rural students. The values of rural living should be stressed. The recognition that the needs of rural students are different in some instances than those of students living in urban communities and the preparation of rural school personnel should provide for these differences. There remain too many inefficient rural school districts which can not offer a broad curriculum. The community school concept should be considered in more rural communities. There needs to

be more implementation of some of demonstrated ways to improve instruction in rural classrooms. These are only a few of the concerns for the future.

If the urban migrations to rural communities continues, as predicted by Frank Triplett, small towns will face some of the problems of the metropolitan centers. Tight budgets and an expansion in community needs could increase at a faster rate than revenues. There will be new problems, as well as those which have been identified. The future for rural education holds many challenges for inspired, dedicated individuals.

Eleanor Roosevelt, at the clost of the 1944 White House Conference on Rural Education, expressed the thoughts that I have today.

> ...If we know what we need, and really want it, we can get it, but we do have to know what we need, and I hope from this Conference there will go to the people of the country the knowledge which they need to get what they want.

Dr. Farley was national president of the Association of Field Services in Teacher Education in 1962 and national president of the Department of Rural Education, NEA in 1963. She has received seven awards for outstanding contributions in education, including the "Distinguished Service Award" in 1978 by the Nebraska Council of School Administrators.

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